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Exhibitions at New York Galleries

By Special Correspondent

THOSE collectors who are buying modern American art by contemporary painters will find support for their theory that this is true wisdom, in the prices recently paid in auction rooms for masterpieces by the men of yesterday.

On the heels of the recent sale of Blake-lock's "Moonlight" at \$20,000 comes the news of the sale of a Winslow Homer, entitled, "A Great Gale," at the Snedecor Galleries in New York, for \$30,000. Some twenty years ago the artist received exactly \$750 for this same canvas. As in the case of the Blakelock the purchaser of the Homer was a museum, that of Worcester, and the price is the highest ever paid for a canvas by this artist. It was originally purchased by T. B. Clark at the time it

was exhibited at the World's Fair in Chicago.

Subsequently, when his effects were disposed of in 1899, this canvas, with sixteen others by the same artist, brought only a little more than the amount just paid for "The Great Gale." So it would seem that next to city lots in boom towns nothing appreciates so rapidly in value as do paintings after the death of their authors.

"The Great Gale" was painted in the early nineties, when Homer was at the height of his powers, producing magnificent coast scenes filled with the freshness and force of the sea. The composition is simple and powerful. A woman's figure stands on the beach looking out toward the horizon. Heavy waves are rolling in and the spray fills the air.

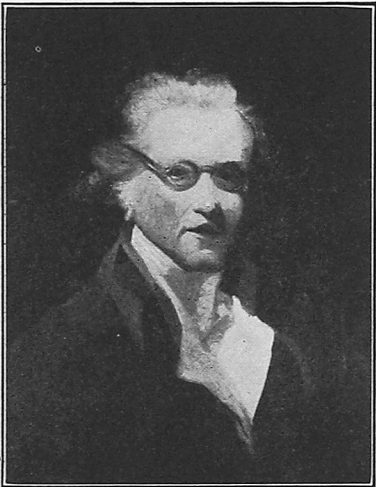
Winslow Homer is represented in most of the important museums of this country and also in the Luxembourg. The French Gallery owns his "Sum-

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mer Night," Boston owns "The Fog Warning" and "The Lookout," the Layton Art Gallery at Cincinnati has "Hark! The Lark," the Pennsylvania Academy has the "Fox Hunt," the Providence Museum "On a Lee Shore," the Carnegie Institute "The Wreck," the Corcoran Gallery "A Light on the Sea," the National Gallery "High Cliff, Coast of Maine" and "The Visit of the Mistress," and the Metropolitan Museum "Cannon Rock," "The Gulf Stream," "Harvest Scene," "Northeaster," and the "Searchlight," besides the water-colors.

TWO ACADEMIES

UNDER this title *The New York Sun* prints one of the ablest editorials on the subject of art that has ever appeared in a daily newspaper. It is herewith reproduced in full and should be carefully read by every critic and artist in the country, especially by the younger men who are wandering about in the maze of theories that have been put forward upon this subject:

When men first tried to talk to one another across time or space they made pictures of their messages on leaf or bark and sent them to the absent, or left them carved upon the rock of their tombs for posterity. Whether it was done to meet the need of a moment or in response to a deeper impulse such communications were born of man's effort to extend the range of his personal and tribal life and to bid defiance to death itself.

Even where the element of decoration entered, as in the painting or tattooing of bodies, it was usually for a definite purpose—to make the warrior terrible to his enemies or to serve as a symbol in religious observance. Exactly where delight in beauty entered no man can say. The impulse toward imitation is inherent in monkey, bird and baby. Some clever-handed Narcissus, beholding his face in the water, would naturally turn about and record his admiring version of it with stick or finger upon the bank. And if another, less handsome but wealthy by virtue of the fish which he had caught while Narcissus gazed, should call for a portrait, he probably would get it, being the original patron of art. When a third fellow—the first visitor to an art show—came by, the artist would call his attention to the strong lines of character and the improvement in style of the second picture. He had forgot himself in his work and art was born!

The curious reader is referred to the public libraries for an outline of what has happened between these beginnings and the spring exhibition of the National Academy of Design, just opened on West Fifty-seventh street; also what might be called the International Academy of Color, which closed recently at 15 West Fortieth street. The latter is known as the "Forum" exhibition of modern art. And the artists are Americans, though some of them

were born elsewhere and others live abroad. But whatever it be called, it has a kinship with the "International" show held some three years ago in the armory. In the "Forum" exhibition catalogue W. H. de B. Nelson thus characterizes the earlier event:

"The armory exhibition was at once a success and a fiasco. It was a success inasmuch as it compelled the public to do a little thinking. * * * It was a fiasco for the reason that a plethora of material selected at haphazard confused the mind and failed to set any logical standards by which modern work could be estimated."

The object of the 1916 exhibition was, according to the catalogue, "to put before the American public in a large and complete manner the very best examples of the more modern American art; to present for the first time a comprehensive, critical selection of the serious painting now being shown in isolated groups. * * * Every painting here is, after a fashion, vouched for by men whose integrity and knowledge of art are beyond question."

If that doesn't constitute it an academy, what could do so? The honorable authorities on Fifty-seventh street vouch for their exhibit, by implication, with equal seriousness. It is true that Robert Henri, a member of both institutions, has registered his protest against each. "I am opposed to an art jury," he writes, "when I am serving on it. I seek to destroy it." He explains that his chief purpose in furthering such a display is to attract public interest to painting. But taste, he protests, "cannot be standardized."

Now where is the line drawn between the Tweedledee academy and the Tweedledum academy? Between many of the pictures in each, no essential difference is evident. They are variations upon a theme subject. Zorach is no farther from a photograph in his incidental man attached to a giant mustache than George Bellows is in his caricatures of persons in the audience at a Billy Sunday meeting.

Or, take another subject—buildings. Paul King, at Fifty-seventh street, shows a house and its yard, painted practically in one color, of many gradations. It is vague, tender, seen through a mist. Oscar Bluemner, of the moderns, gives us Paterson factories, quite as recognizable as King's dwelling, but sharply drawn, angular, opposing the red of their walls to the hostile green of the trees. The roofs push upward the very skies, which do not touch them, but stop at a marginal distance all the way round. It requires no great effort of imagination to see them in that way, through the eyes of a tired laborer.

No matter with what purpose the artist begins, he is certain to put something of himself into his work. The more faithfully he studies nature, the more passionately he devotes himself to her expression, the more complete will be his self-revelation. This is plain in the work of two men as widely separated in time and in spirit as Durer and Rodin. We

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happen to have Rodin's own words on the point, reported by Gsell in "Art":

"I obey Nature in everything, and I never pretend to command her. My only ambition is to be servilely faithful to her."

When Gsell persisted with a touch of malice, "It is not nature, exactly as it is, that you evoke," Rodin replied, frowning, "Yes, exactly as it is!" But presently he admitted that an actual cast of a figure would not look like his modelling of the same subject. He held that the cast would be less true to life, adding, "I reproduce the spirit, which is certainly also a part of nature." Truly it is, but since it is the artist that expresses it he must by his very choice of means put in something of his own spirit as well as that of the subject. For he declares, "I accentuate the lines which best express the spiritual state that I interpret."

It is not, indeed, as Dr. Christian Brinton explains, it never was a question of exactly reproducing the appearance of objects. The task of the artist is "indication" rather than "imitation." The degree or the manner of departure from the subject, so long as there is a recognizable subject, is not a clear enough distinction.

Nevertheless, in our two academies there is a difference, discernible on the walls and pointed out in the "Forum" catalogue. The National Academy harbors more so-called "literary art," the other one turns in the direction of music. In fact, we might call it the Academy of Music. Alas, poor Painting! She is like a child who cries, "Mother, I'm tired of wearing Sister Literature's dresses. I want clothes of my own, like Music." But the mother answers, with a gentle smile, "Very well, if you can get Sister Music to divide with you."

The point appears to be this: A true picture of a tree has two kinds of appeal. It will doubtless recall to the mind a pleasant afternoon spent in the shade; to the more attentive eye it will speak of the artist's feeling for the infinite gradations of green, of his rendering of the roundness and solidity of the trunk. Now any painter might tell you in line and color the story of the tree's presence in the orchard. He might remind you of the pleasant shade or of the apples you ate there. But words would do all that—which is the meaning of the phrase "literary" or story art. Now, say our moderns, if the artist can give you a scale of greens, liquid with leaf-loveliness, and a rounded bulk or a series of solidities about which the leaping eye may run gayly like a squirrel—if he can do this without mixing into the composition any childish tales of trees or apples, he will be doing what the composer does when he writes music without words. One of the artists represented in the "Forum" show, Macdonald-Wright, puts it this way in the catalogue:

"I strive to divest my art of all anecdote and illustration, and to purify it to the point where the emotions of the spectator will be wholly æsthetic, as

when listening to good music. * * * Illustrative music is a thing of the past: it has become abstract and purely æsthetic, dependent for its effect upon rhythm and form. Painting certainly need not lag behind music."

Into such attempts at too close analogy between painting and music fallacies are bound to enter. Music never depended upon imitation for its power, though it makes use at times of imitative effects. Song comes more directly from within, like the emotional variations of the voice in talk, which follow the activity of the mind in selecting and forming the words used. Variation in accent, time and tone is more intimate and more frequent a means of conveying thought and feeling than variation of line or color. Therefore it is more human and always will be. The painter needs to strengthen every possible tie of association between his canvas and the visible world that is the common property of the eyes of men.

This does not mean that there can be no change in the modes of the painter's expression. Every year brings wider scope and greater freedom—for those free souls who alone have the power to use freedom. Liberty is not a form, an invention, it is the breath of life itself. From the very days of antiquity art has been the freest field of labor known to man. In this he never had to make bricks without straw. His very prison walls taught him perspective. The near horizon based heaven's infinity. He closed a prophet's pictured face within a trembling line and lo! God Almighty was there. He lifted mountains with his little finger and gathered the ocean in the hollow of his hand. Art was man's escape from his limitations by way of them. Along the track of what he knew he reached the border of the unknown, and having explored that, returned to a greater, a hitherto unknown self.

No doubt the older academy needed the younger one, the counteraction whose later phases we find represented at the "Forum" exhibition. Art, like politics, needs an opposition. And the minority leader here is Alfred Stieglitz. A master of the camera, he has fought against the photographic in painting. To the man who simply reproduces the superficial aspect of material, without interpreting, he says, "My camera can do that. If you are an artist you must do more." The only answer to such a challenge is art that uses the visible forms of life to convey the power that works in and through the artist. Painting models over and over and labelling them "Truth," "Sphinx" or whatnot does not answer.

Nor can the people who do not themselves paint escape responsibility. The truest thing Mr. Stieglitz has written in his preface to the "Forum" catalogue is this:

"No public can help the artist unless it has become conscious that it is only through the artist that it is helped to develop itself. When that is once actually



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understood, felt, art in this country may have taken root."

One remedy for an apathetic, an uninstructed public is the breaking down of the barriers that tend to set off the expression of beauty as a separate department of life. We need fewer easel artists, fewer producers of typical academy pictures and more, far more laborers who will transform our whole environment. We need better wall papers, better furniture, better fabrics and better houses. Samuel McIntire, the great Colonial carpenter, was worth a great deal more than the men who filled miles of canvas in the Capitol.

But to return to this year's pictures. We have tried to make it clear that the artists who abandon recognizable form as a common language are going in the wrong direction. They may discover some new things about color and we will give them due credit as inventors and scientists. They may work out certain principles relating to the operation of the mind and we will call them good psychologists or even philosophers. But creation is another matter.

The danger of both attitudes lies in preoccupation with externals. The great artist must be a great man and have great things to say. We refuse to mourn over the lost freshness of life as the first men saw it. Primitive art is beautiful, direct, sincere, but there are yet greater things to say about life than any that have been said. Further, the man who says them will have to use every resource that time has developed.

He will recognize no taboos. Travellers have told us that among savages of a certain tribe it is counted a misfortune to be touched by a hollow stick. They fear that an empty head will result. Are not such of our old academicians as refuse to consider any departure from the model and such of our new academicians as refuse to let Nature pose in their studios putting themselves in the same class? Let us not fear magic but rather seek it.

Progress is not a matter of method but of growth. And it is man himself; not the tool of his hand, that grows. Art is a mode of living. The task of the workman is to interpret the heart of Life in terms of the face. His prayer must be:

"Lord, deliver me from the surface on which I work."

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(Seal)

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